

Smells like team spirit



Weekend retreats and touchy-feely exercises may do more to create bad-feeling than build teams. Instead, take some lessons from a winning volleyball coach

It's time someone finally said it: most of what passes for team-building these days doesn't really build teams. So why do companies spend millions of dollars annually to make their employees go through ineffective team-building activities: walking around in blindfolds, navigating rope courses, and sitting crosslegged on the floor with paper and crayons illustrating their 'life paths'?

There are three reasons. While it's generally recognized that a great team will beat a mediocre team 99 times out of 100, little hard thinking goes on at most companies about how effective teams are actually built. Employees usually don't complain about silly team-building efforts, whether out of apathy or for fear of being labeled 'anti-team'. Finally, most team-building practitioners are well-meaning, sincere people whom no one wants to offend.

So if conventional team-building activities are largely ineffective, how do you build a great team? In 1978, I played a supporting role on a volleyball team that won the first National Championship in our university's history. That team was made up of people who weren't the most physically-gifted athletes in the world. But they merged into a force that was far greater than the sum of the players' individual abilities.

Nearly 30 years later, what I learned that season remains one of the most important lessons of my life. Great

teams – whether composed of athletes, businesspeople, fire fighters, military commandos, or what have you – teach us four key lessons:

1 _____. One of the most memorable features of my 1978 team was the level of intensity which the players brought to every practice and game. The atmosphere was charged with an emotional commitment that caused members of the team to constantly push each other to give everything in service of the goal.

Far too often, a company thinks it has a team-building problem when what it really has is a goal problem. If you want to build a great team, make sure its members share a determined passion to accomplish something. How do you get that kind of commitment? By involving everyone in the development of the goal.

2 _____. It's not enough to get a bunch of people together who care deeply about reaching a goal. They need to have a strategy for achieving it. The best team-building tool ever is a good strategy that everyone buys into. If you want to increase teamwork, don't focus on the team, focus the team on the task.

My team coach had a detailed strategy for winning that the players bought into completely. A part of the strategy was to overcome our physical shortcomings with a commitment to superior conditioning and training. So, for two months the team endured a schedule so demanding that it was the

talk of the campus.

3 _____. Yes, trust and respect are key. But ironically, often the best way to increase levels of trust and respect on a team is to get them focused on the goal and the strategy. This gets people saying what they really think. When people say what they really think and are held accountable, trust and respect usually follow. Don't impose an atmosphere of false politeness.

There was plenty of conflict on the team and people sometimes lost their tempers. But on the court an atmosphere of respect always prevailed. All great business teams share that same quality.

4 _____. There's no getting around it, great teams usually have great managers. My old team coach still coaches volleyball at that same university today. He has an unrivalled 426-162 win-loss record and has also coached a US team to a World Championship and an Olympic gold medal.

So, learn how to be a great coach. Aspiring business leaders would be a lot better off if they spent less time reading management literature, and more time around people like my old coach. The great college coaches may know more about team-building than anyone else in the world. After all, their leadership and team-building skills are measured in real time, in front of real crowds. And they start from scratch with a new team every year.


4.4 Speaking Coaching

Discussion

1 Decide how you would respond as a manager to each of these situations. Choose options from the list a–l.

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1 A new employee has failed to complete an important project. | |
| 2 An experienced employee has failed to produce an important report. | |
| 3 A new employee has delighted customers with exceptional service. | |
| 4 An experienced employee has delighted customers with exceptional service. | |
| a) fire the employee | g) pay them a bonus |
| b) supervise the employee more closely | h) give them more autonomy |
| c) scream and shout for twenty minutes | i) thank them for their hard work |
| d) have a heart to heart talk to identify the causes | j) give them a promotion |
| e) give them a final warning | k) tell them not to overdo it |
| f) do nothing | l) something else |

Listening

2  **1:33–1:34** Listen to two interviews between Mrs Gomez, a store manager in the Philippines, and Rafael, a department supervisor. Answer the questions.

- 1 What was the objective of each interview?
- 2 What did Rafael do wrong or right?
- 3 How do you think Rafael feels at the end of each interview?

3 Read the two procedures for giving feedback below. Which contains advice relevant to the first interview in 2? Which is relevant to the second?

Recognizing merit

- 1 Make contact
 - Set the scene: describe the time, place and situation when performance was exceptional.
 - Refer to the work in question.
- 2 Give praise
 - Give a specific example of the facts or results you appreciate.
 - Point out the personal qualities which contributed to your employee's success.
- 3 Conclusion
 - Explain the positive consequences of the employee's behaviour for the company, the department, and for you yourself.
 - Keep the interview short and avoid discussing other subjects; one or two minutes are usually enough.

Constructive criticism

- 1 Make contact
 - Set the scene: describe the time, place, and situation when the problem occurred.
 - Describe the problems and the results – state facts, not opinions.
- 2 Diagnose the problem
 - Elicit the causes of the problem (behaviour, method, equipment, organization, etc).
 - Express your opinion.
 - Explain the consequences for the organization.
- 3 Commit to action
 - Offer suggestions which recognize the employee's good points but eliminate the faults.
 - Invite the employee to make comments.
- 4 Conclusion
 - Set new objectives, stating the methods to be used and a deadline.

4 Referring to the guide, explain why Mrs Gomez did not handle the interviews very well.

4.4 Speaking: Coaching

Role-play (page 51, exercise 9)

Student A

Situation 1

Your job: Department Manager, Sports Department
While you were away on vacation, and unreachable, your mountain bike supplier phoned your assistant manager to say he couldn't supply the bikes you'd ordered for a big campaign starting the following week. Fortunately your assistant manager spent most of the weekend finding alternative suppliers and delivering bikes to the store, after negotiating even better terms than you had obtained from the original supplier. Show her/him just how pleased you are with what she/he did.

Situation 2

Your job: Manager, white goods department
Your boss, the General Manager, has asked to see you, probably to get/give feedback on the one-day training session you ran for sales assistants last month. You know she/he wasn't very happy about the cost, but was persuaded to go ahead. You are sure the training session was very beneficial – be prepared to justify the time and investment.

Situation 3

Your job: Manager, toy department
One of your sales assistants is a maverick. A brilliant communicator, she/he has a natural talent for selling and keeping customers happy. However, she/he is constantly late, sometimes spends several hours in the cafeteria, and rarely completes any paperwork. Tell her/him how you feel.

Situation 4

Your job: Administrative assistant, finance department
You are responsible for promoting the store's credit card. By encouraging your large circle of friends from university to sign up for the credit card, you have achieved excellent results. The Finance Manager has asked to see you - you expect she/he wants to congratulate you on your success.

3.4 Speaking: Delivering presentations

Presentation (page 39, exercise 9)

Use the table to give feedback on your colleagues' presentations.
1 = Poor, 2 = Acceptable, 3 = Good, 4 = Excellent

	1	2	3	4
Pauses				
Sentence length				
Signposting				
Speed				
Collocations				
Explanation of jargon				
Clarity				
Impact				

5.6 Case study: Backchat Communications

Negotiation (page 69, exercise 7)

Sellers

Follow the instructions below to calculate your score.

	Score
Give yourself 1 point for every Basic contract sold.	
Give yourself 2 points for every Plus contract sold.	
Give yourself 3 points for every Hi-tech contract sold	
Give yourself 1 point for every 18-month contract sold	
Give yourself 2 points for every 24-month contract sold	
Give yourself 1 point for every extra sold	
Deduct 1 point for every extra given free	
Deduct 1 point for every 5000 won discount given	
Total	

2.6 Case study: Meteor Bank

Discussion (page 29, exercise 6)

Student C

You represent the Operations Department at the meeting. You feel strongly that the current situation is unacceptable, and that the only way to resolve the problems is to outsource the department, even if it means cutting jobs, including Saul Finley's. This will immediately solve the problems of turnover, downtime, unrest in the IT department, and investment.

7.4 Speaking: Communicating in meetings

Role-play (page 91, exercise 8)

David

- You are happy with the idea of changing software because the existing system has never performed very well. However, you want to avoid any extra costs on your department budget.
- You estimate that you will need to employ two external computer engineers on the project for at least six months. You would like Mahler to pay for this
- You would also like Mahler to pay for training for your staff on the new software. However, you may have to compromise.

4.4 Speaking: Coaching

Role-play (page 51, exercise 9)

Student B

Situation 1

Your job: Assistant manager, sports department
After organizing a big advertising campaign with special offers on mountain bikes for the following week, your boss, the department manager, went on vacation. However, your biggest supplier phoned to say he couldn't supply the bikes. Your boss was unreachable, so you worked all weekend to resolve the problem, which upset your family. Now you expect you're going to be criticized for dealing with the problem yourself without consulting your boss.

Situation 2

Your job: General Manager
You are the General Manager. The manager of your white goods department ran a one-day training session for sales assistants last month. Although you were sceptical, the feedback was excellent and you have heard that the whole store has felt the benefits of the staff's new motivation. Tell your department manager how happy you are with what she/he did.

Situation 3

Your job: Sales assistant
You are the best sales assistant in the toy department, and probably in the whole store (you have won the prize for the salesperson of the month three times in the last year). Your boss wants to see you - this is an opportunity to ask for more flexible working hours. You feel that if you are free to choose to work when there are most customers in the store, you can achieve even more spectacular results than up to now.

Situation 4

Your job: Finance Manager
Despite previous warnings, one of your new young administrative assistants is giving credit to her/his student friends who do not have a regular income. So far there hasn't been a problem, but the risk has become too high. Otherwise, the assistant is doing an excellent job. Make sure she/he understands that she/he has to be careful about who she/he gives credit to.

4.2 Vocabulary Managing people and projects



Discussion

1 Work with a partner. Match the nouns in the box with the descriptions a–e. Which character do you think would be most difficult to manage and why? Which description best describes you?

The bully The team player The leader The workaholic The maverick

- a This character does things their own way. They may be effective, but they're difficult to control.
- b This person has a natural ability to encourage others and take a project through to success.
- c This person doesn't know when to stop, and they often believe the office would collapse without them.
- d This person imposes their personality on others, making other people feel bad in the workplace.
- e This person has a natural ability to fit in. They make positive contributions and build good relationships.

2 Which character type in 1 would you associate with each adjective below?

aggressive anxious charismatic confident cooperative decisive
 easy-going friendly helpful impatient independent individual motivating
 obsessive over-critical single-minded stressed unpredictable

Listening

3 1:32 Listen to an HR manager and line manager talking about three different members of their team. Decide which of the labels in 1 best describes each person.

Anna _____ Bjorn _____ Katia _____

4 Listen again. Which adjectives do you hear that confirm your answer in 3?

Expressions

5 The expressions in *italic* all occurred in the recording. Match phrases 1–8 with the appropriate reply in a–h. Use a dictionary to help you if necessary.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Marion is in danger of burning out . | a Except Rob, but he doesn't like anyone! |
| 2 How are you settling in ? | b I wish I could, but things are just too hectic. |
| 3 If we want to succeed, we must pull together . | c I know! He asked me to do his report for him! |
| 4 He's always passing the buck ! | d No, you can rely on me! |
| 5 She gets on well with everyone. | e Perhaps we should run a team-building course ? |
| 6 Don't let me down , will you? | f Yes. She's a workaholic . It's affecting her health. |
| 7 Dave isn't pulling his weight ! | g You're right, and that means more work for us! |
| 8 You should learn to take it easy . | h Fine, thanks, though I still don't know everyone. |